

Aggy - Iles Inlet and The Courtesan

Entrance Series – The log book is situated just inside the entrance, please use this to indicate your intended destination and time out. The Entrance Series is a fun, sporting collection of wedged boulders to hop over, narrow rifts to squeeze through and short crawls and climbs, all of which is well trod so you can basically follow the caver-polished route. The key thing to remember when heading into Aggy is **always take the left-hand route when you reach a junction**. Following this golden rule you shouldn't go too far wrong but be aware that some of these are low down so can be easily missed. There are a few higher level passages heading off along the way, but these are bat roosting sites and should be avoided.

Beyond the initial rifty sections, at a point when the passage takes on a larger scale (just after you emerge from a slot behind a boulder), look for a climb up over the rocks on the left. This provides the easiest route of continuation, while taking the more obvious straight ahead route ends at an awkward climb and squeeze to regain the way on. Continue on this high level until you reach then end and a taped off section and sign is visible ahead, then descend the smooth sided hole through boulders in the floor. Below, there are more holes in the floor, but continue to the end and descend into a passage heading off to the right. Then take the side passage almost immediately on your left, which is low down and easy to miss. A small streamway is met and from here on the route is straightforward, with a knobbly crawl over polished rocks ending at climb up to gain the impressively sized Baron's Chamber, near a blue sign attached to a boulder. Take note of your location as you emerge from the climb as it's partially obscured and easily missed on the return.

Main Passage and Southern Stream Passage – The easiest way along the first part of Main Passage is to keep to the left hand wall. Shortly after you are forced to climb down into the middle of the passage the junction with Main Stream Passage is met. The continuation of Main Passage and the route to Southern Stream is upslope on the left. This part of the cave is remarkably pleasant and the passage is undoubtedly one of the finest in Wales – make the most of this while you can as the following section is quite the opposite!

There are a few passages heading off in this section but the junction with Southern Stream Passage is easy to spot – the floor drops away on the right hand side of the passage and a clamber down a boulder slope leads into a dry passage. Continue over boulders, pass through a constriction, then a short distance beyond a hole down between boulders leads into Southern Stream Passage. This is our route and the start of a section of caving of far less sizeable proportions. The continuing higher level route leads to Sandstone Passage and Upper Southern Stream.

The first section of Southern Stream is mostly stooping passage and relatively free of obstacles and there is normally very little water. First Inlet enters from the left, and after another 250m further the smaller Second Inlet, equipped with a drinking cup, enters from the right. This is roughly the halfway point from the start of Southern Stream to the waterfall. From here onwards there are more obstacles to impede progress. Often there is a dry alternative to crawling in water, although in a couple of places this is unavoidable. At one of these the roof lowers until it is impassable, but on the left side a narrow ascending slot provides a bypass. Soon after this the going starts to get easier with some open walking passage, which suddenly arrives at the top of a small waterfall. A handline has been provided for the 2m climb.

The going is comparatively easy and much more pleasant after the waterfall, with occasional climbs up and over boulder obstacles. Look out for the short rope climb and rope traverse in a section where the upper part of the passage is significantly wider. Climb the rope to the wedged boulder and use the fixed line to traverse across to reach Gothic Passage and the Gothic extensions

– if you were to continue along Southern Stream instead you would eventually reach Lower Main Streamway and the original Grand Circle route.

Gothic Passage to Iles Inlet and The Courtesan – Gothic Passage starts as an easy walking passage but quickly lowers to a crawl before arriving at a T-junction. Take the left-hand route here to Priory Road (heading right leads to Maytime and Grand Circle via High Traverse) and walking is soon regained before once again becoming a crawl to meet another junction. This time we head right (where BNS is written in carbide), while left soon reaches a dig. A flat-out crawl then leads to Ribbed Fault, which has a large aven overhead and fallen blocks on the floor. Skirting to the right of the blocks and heading left leads to Priory Road, while following the taped path heading right soon reaches a dead end.

Priory Road begins rather uncomfortably with a prolonged crawl in wide but low passage. Some crystal formations are passed along the way, and there are occasional places to stand up beneath avens until progress eventually becomes easier. The passage then regains walking dimensions once more with only the odd section of stooping and an inlet is passed on the left. At a large junction, take a sharp left to continue along Priory Road (straight on reaches a choke, and The Cathedral can be reached by a strenuous climb up a small aven just after the bend).

The next passage heading off on the left is Iles Inlet, the route to The Courtesan. A very deep pit in the floor marked with a 'Deep Excavations' sign is soon met. This impressive digging effort drops down to a low crawl with a sand squeeze up to reach open passage on the other side; you will encounter a few more of these as various dug through sections are met along the way, along with a couple of awkward S bends. However, all the effort of getting there is well rewarded when you emerge at the 2005 breakthrough point. Trafalgar Passage continues straight ahead, while a small rift on the left just before the first formations leads to Corkscrew Chamber and The Courtesan.

Trafalgar Passage is lofty and has some impressively fine formations, more in common with Urchin Oxbow and Antler Passage in Daren Cilau than anything you'd usually find in Aggy. Here you should stay within the taped route to protect the floor sediments as well as the formations. The passage lowers to a crawl as it approaches the end and terminates at a sand dig which has a vocal connection to The Bunker at the end of Priory Road.

Back at the start of Trafalgar Passage, take the small side just before the first formations to reach Corkscrew Chamber. A short, but awkward thrutch up reaches the chamber with The Courtesan formation straight ahead. This is easily the best formation in Agen Allwedd; perhaps even the best under Llangattock, and there are some very splendid urchin formations too. Beyond this a small tube leads to Broadside - where going left ends with a dig heading towards Bad Bat in Daren Cilau, while heading right passes a draughting rift and aven before lowering to a dig heading towards DADES choke in Daren Cilau.

Severn Beach – If you have the time and energy, a visit to Severn Beach is a worthwhile diversion to see the various digs heading towards DADES choke and Dweebland in Daren Cilau. To do this, continue along Priory Road at the junction with Iles Inlet, passing avens to reach a sandy swim to Glevum Hall. Heading upslope over roof collapse reaches another crawl to Severn Beach, and further crawls lead on to digs at Birthday Surprise and The Bunker. There is only 22 metres between Agen Allwedd and Daren Cilau at the closest point.

Spotted an error in this route description or want to leave feedback?
Contact the Webmaster (see contacts page on CSS website <https://chelseaspelaeo.org>)

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